

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT IS ROHYPNOL?

AN EDUCATIONAL FACT SHEET FROM THE FLORIDA ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE ASSOCIATION

Rohypnol (flunitrazepam) is a strong sedative that is manufactured and distributed by Hoffman-La Roche. It is a member of the benzodiazepine family that includes drugs such as Librium, Xanax, and Valium. Rohypnol has nearly ten times the strength of Valium. Although Rohypnol is used as a presurgical anesthetic for the treatment of insomnia in many countries, the drug has never been approved for medical use in the United States because other safer drugs are available. In South Florida, Rohypnol is smuggled primarily from Colombia via international mail courier services, or commercial airlines. Slang terms for Rohypnol include:

- Roach
- Roche (ro-shay)
- Roofies
- Ruffies,
- Run-Trip-and-Fall
- R-2
- Mexican Valium
- Ropynol
- Rib
- Rope

Being under the influence of the drug is referred to as being "roached out."

USE PATTERNS

Often found at nightclubs and rave parties, Rohypnol is a strong sedative that is abused by teenagers, nightclub attendees, and individuals intent on sexual assault. Taken on its own, Rohypnol is not likely to cause death. Often, however, Rohypnol is consumed with alcohol or other drugs to increase the drug's effects. The combination of alcohol and Rohypnol has caused death. When abused, Rohypnol can cause addiction and dependence with severe withdrawal symptoms.

Rohypnol is manufactured as small, white tablets with "Roche" inscribed on one side with an encircled "1" or "2" indicating a 1 mg or 2 mg dose. Rohypnol is usually taken orally, although there are reports that it has been ground up and snorted. The drug is frequently ingested in conjunction with alcohol or other

drugs, including heroin.

A drink in which Rohypnol has been added will neither look nor taste out of the ordinary.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Other adverse effects associated with the use of flunitrazepam include:

- decreased blood pressure
- slowed psychomotor performance
- loss of bodily control
- disinhibition
- visual disturbances
- dizziness
- confusion
- gastrointestinal disturbances
- urinary retention

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

Effects of Rohypnol begin within thirty minutes, peak within 2 hours, and may persist for up to 8 hours or more, depending upon the dosage. After taking Rohypnol, the user may feel intoxicated, then sleepy. Users under the influence may exhibit slurred speech, impaired judgment, and difficulty talking. Rohypnol can cause deep sedation, respiratory distress, blackouts that can last up to 24 hours, and amnesia where users forget events experienced while under the influence. In some cases, the drug has paradoxical effects and causes users to become aggressive. The potential for overdose or death can occur, especially when mixed with other drugs like alcohol.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

Regular use of Rohypnol results in tolerance and physical dependence. Risk of becoming addicted increases with the dose used and with duration of use. Users with a history of alcohol or drug abuse are at greater risk for dependence. Once physical dependence occurs, withdrawal symptoms will appear if Rohypnol use abruptly ceases. Withdrawal symptoms include headache, muscle pain, extreme anxiety, tension, restlessness, confusion, and irritability. Numbness, tingling of the

extremities, loss of identity, hallucinations, delirium, convulsion, shock, and cardiovascular collapse also may occur. Withdrawal seizures can occur a week or more after cessation of use. As with other benzodiazepines, treatment for flunitrazepam dependence must be gradual, with use tapering off under medical supervision

“DATE-RAPE” DRUG

Rohypnol is known as a “date-rape” drug because the drug is sometimes given to unwary victims without their consent. Attackers with the intent of sexual assault use the drug to incapacitate women and men. The most common method used to drug someone has been to slip it into a drink at a bar, night club, rave, or party.

Ways to prevent the unknowing consumption of Rohypnol include:

- attending events and parties with friends who will watch out for each other
- watching your drink being poured
- never leaving your drink unattended

Users who use Rohypnol to incapacitate women for the purposes of sexual assault may also use the drug to target men and women for other criminal acts such as robbery.

If you believe that Rohypnol has been added to your drink and experience any symptoms, have someone take you to a hospital immediately. Tests can be administered up to 48 hours after ingestion. If you believe you have been assaulted, contact a rape crisis center or hospital immediately. Be certain to tell hospital staff if you suspect that you may have been drugged so they will preserve the evidence. Furthermore, it is important to get medical attention because of the threat of sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection, and pregnancy.

LEGAL CONSEQUENCES

In response to the abuse of Rohypnol, the Drug-induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996 was enacted into federal law. This law makes it a crime to give someone a controlled substance without a person’s knowledge and with intent to commit a violent crime. The law subjects rapists to an additional 20 years in prison if they use a narcotic to incapacitate their victims. Simple possession of Rohypnol, with no proven intent, carries up to three years in prison.

The Florida Legislature classified Rohypnol as a Schedule I (a) of the Florida Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control in March 1997. Other Schedule I controlled substances include heroin and LSD. This action significantly increased the penalties for abuse and trafficking in Rohypnol. A substance in Schedule I has a high potential for abuse and has no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States and in its use under medical supervision does not meet accepted safety standards. Under Florida law, possession of Rohypnol is considered a first degree felony and punishable by up to 30 years.

Also, law enforcement officers may now test drivers who are believed to be driving under the influence of Rohypnol.

REFERENCES

DEA Congressional Testimony, May 1996.

Texas Commission on Alcohol & Drug Abuse, *Rohypnol and GHB*.

U.S. Department of Justice. Drug Enforcement Administration. *Flunitrazepam*, 1997.



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